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ROLLING STONE
16 January 1986

SECRET AGENT MAN

NO WONDER MILES COPELAND'S KIDS FORMED THE POLICE

DOUBLE AGENTS SELLING SECRETS TO FOREIGN GOVERNMENTS; defectors running amok in the streets of Washington; allies betraying allies – these days spies are out of the shadows and on the spot. Yet espionage isn't what it once was, and at least one Cold War vet fondly remembers overthrowing unfriendly governments, planning assassinations and performing dirty tricks. Most of all, retired CIA officer Miles Copeland (whose brood of rock & roll overachievers includes oldest son Miles Copeland III, manager of the Police and solo Sting; Ian, founder of the music booking agency FBI; and youngest son Stewart, drummer first for Curved Air and later for the Police) yearns for the good old days when secret agents kept their secrets secret – from the government and especially from the press.

Born in Birmingham, Alabama, Copeland joined the U.S. Army in 1940. Assigned to the Counter-Intelligence Corps (CIC), he transferred in 1942 to the new Office of Strategic Services (OSS), the first U.S. secret intelligence agency. After the war, Copeland was

BY ROBERT ERINGER

station chief in Damascus, "putting Syria," as he recalls, "on the path to democracy by starting a military dictatorship." For this achievement, he was awarded a presidential citation. Copeland became a member of the Central Intelligence Agency when it was founded in 1947; he was appointed chief of the agency's Political Action Staff, the dirty-tricks department, in 1950. "Nobody," he says, "knows more about changing governments, by force or otherwise, than me."

Copeland left government service in 1957 to form his own "private CIA," which he claims became the largest private security service operating in Africa and the Middle East. Today the seventy-two-year-old Copeland and his wife, Lorraine, a well-known British archaeologist, live in a stone cottage in the tranquil hamlet of Aston Rowant, near Oxford, in England.

The White House has given the CIA part of the job of handling terrorism. What do you think they will do that is different from what has already been done?

You know, you're opening a real can of worms here. The difference between the CIA's counterterrorist experts and this new kind that's been proliferating all over the place is that the CIA has operators who *know* the terrorists, who've actually talked to a few, who've even lived with them, or who, like myself, have actually *been* terrorists. We understand the enemy, while these instant experts who've been advising the White House have never in their lives laid eyes on a terrorist, and they think of them as common criminals. Maybe they are, and maybe they aren't, but where these recent "experts" are wrong is that they *assume* they are criminals simply because they are judging them as though they are Americans, brought up on American ideas of what's right and what's wrong. They are making moral judgments that aren't relevant to the situation. What may be effective in combating crime is not likely to be effective in dealing with wrongdoers who in their own eyes, whether rightly or wrongly, think they are engaged in some noble cause. The Pentagon wants to kill them; the CIA wants to win them over.

Who's winning?

It's not a matter of winning. Just different viewpoints. The president of the United States has got to say what is necessary to keep himself in office. We have a *domestic* foreign policy and a *foreign* foreign policy. The domestic foreign policy, which is the more important one, is what he has to do to make the American public think he's doing the right thing. Whether it's the right thing or not doesn't matter. The American people have to *think* he's doing the right thing because we have a democratic society. Now, the American people were highly indignant about what happened in Beirut [the hijacking of TWA flight 847 in June 1985]. They wanted to *do* something. They wanted to punish the people without regard to the consequences. The president had to say things to them, make threats, to show the American people that, by God, we were doing something. But the professionals inside the government were worried about the consequences of this. Because what it takes to please the American people is not what it takes to please a lot of people who did not grow up in the American culture but grew up in cultures quite different from our own. We've got most of the world against us at the moment. When we drag out our gunboats, bomb villages and kill a lot of women and children – a lot more than the terrorists kill – we turn the world against us. And the American people don't care. They don't give a damn. But those people whose job it is to look after the interests of the U.S. government abroad, they've got to care. They have to think of the consequences of everything we do. And they know the consequences of dragging out the gunboats are absolutely the wrong ones. In fact, these are the consequences the terrorists created acts of terrorism in order to provoke. That's the *purpose* of terrorism, *not* to kill, maim or destroy, but to *terrorize*, to frighten, to anger, to provoke irrational responses. Terrorism gains more from the responses than it gains from the actions themselves.

So how do you deal with it?

You've got to know who they are. You've got to know their reasons for doing it. And you've got to manipulate them in one way or another. We have to somehow come to grips with the problem. The Israelis went in to Lebanon and killed tens of thousands of people. They say, "That's exaggerating, we didn't kill but 5000 people." Okay, let's say they killed only 2000 people, which is a very modest estimate. But they destroyed Lebanon. They then set up groups against each other, made chaos ten times worse than it already was. Instead of helping the Shiites – the Shiites *welcomed* the Israelis in – we, the United States, gave a billion dollars

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to the Israelis. One billion we gave because it costs a lot of money to destroy someone else's country. We gave peanuts – Red Cross supplies – to the Shiites. What we should have done is gone in there and said to the Shiites: "Look, a lot of injustice has been done. We're going to put your orange groves back and put you back commercially. . . ."

Is that your answer for potential terrorists? Give them lots of aid to keep them sweet?

No. Let's get back to the reason these guys are terrorists. They're terrorists because their orange groves have been destroyed and they've got nothing to do. They can't even get to their farms because the Israelis have declared them out of bounds and destroyed a lot of them. Now, the CIA's job is to explain all of this to our government. That's the main job of the CIA – to go to the White House and explain to the president that the only reason these terrorists are terrorists is because of the way they've been treated, and they've got nothing else to do. In fact, I'll tell you quite frankly, if people came into Alabama, my home state, and destroyed my farms and kicked me around and kicked my children around, I'm going to become a terrorist, just as the French became terrorists under the Germans in World War II. It's understandable. The CIA understood this and understood it very well and explained it to the president. But we had pressures from Congress. The members of Congress don't give a damn about foreign affairs. They give a damn about their next election. They have to do what makes them popular enough with their constituents to get reelected. And their constituency cares about one place in this world, and that's the United States.

You have told me what we should have done. What should we do to combat terrorism now that the damage has been done?

Well, most terrorists in the world are coming down to two categories. The first kind are people such as the Palestinians, who've had – listen, I've known this one family for the past forty years. The guy has polio, he's crippled. He has some teenage kids who are nice kids, nice family. The Israelis showed up at six o'clock in the evening and said: "Everybody out! Everybody out!" They all got out, and the Israelis razed his house. He says: "I haven't done a damn thing! I'm just looking after my orange groves!" They said, "You had a terrorist in your house six months ago." First place, he said he hadn't, and I believe he was telling the truth. But the Israelis had no good reason to believe he wasn't – no name, no information at all. Now this is information that our embassy reported. This is official, not something I heard from the PLO information office. Now those two teenage kids stood there and watched their family being destroyed and their mother kicked downstairs when she refused to leave the house. Can you imagine their *not* becoming terrorists? They don't have an air force or artillery. I had a Shiite ask me: "You say we shouldn't use terrorism. What should we use?" Well, you shouldn't use anything, we might say. You should make peace with Israel. Make peace with Israel? They've just destroyed my land! I have nothing! My house is flattened! The whole village is destroyed! This isn't just the Shiites talking. Our own embassy says this. You know something that very few people know, and I suspect you ought to leave all this out, but the fact is, in the American foreign service, there are a lot of patriots. You've never seen such patriots in your life. They all fight for American policy, right or wrong. Central America, Vietnam, wherever, except in the Middle East. The whole career service in the Middle East spends all its time fighting its own government. Anyone who doubts that can use the Freedom of Information Act to get the cables, all of them pleading with our own government to stop this support of Israel to that point. I don't mean stop supporting Israel, but stop the behavior of Israel, which is making them hated. And we are backing them against these people they've kicked around. And how did the Israelis get in power? Terrorism. You'd think they'd know something about terrorism since the heads of their government have been terrorists themselves. In fact, Israel wouldn't be there if it hadn't been for their effective terrorists. But they know nothing about terrorism. A friend of mine in Mossad [the Israeli intelligence agency] said: "Terrorism is not going to destroy Israel, but our counterterrorism might, because it costs us a million dollars a day. It might drive us into bankruptcy."

So what's the answer to terrorism?

Like I was saying, we have to find the reason these people are terrorists. The job of the CIA is to report why they are terrorists. Now I said there are two categories. The first, people who have been deprived and been ruined. The second category is this: A lot of these guys have found a way of life. They're like gunslingers in the Old West. They drive Mercedes. There are professional terrorists now. It's a profitable business. Maybe they were criminals originally, criminally inclined, but now they have political motivations to justify themselves. You're not going to find them. Many of them are in Paris, and the French police don't give a damn. The fact is that we are fighting a "proxy war" right now in which Soviet proxies face our proxies. Today's war, between us and the Soviets, is a mosaic of regional wars. The Soviet policy is one of denial, not to gain territory for themselves but to deny it to us, to deprive us of the raw materials from Africa – cobalt, magnesium, chromium – that we have to have for a highly technological society like ours.

Are you saying the Soviets are behind terrorism?

No, they exploit the troubles. Most of the terrorism in the world today the Soviets do not instigate. They may train key people to go in and stir things up, but that's as far as they go. The Soviets are delighted when we draw up a gunboat in the Beirut harbor. They love this. It makes people hate us. The thing we should have done about the TWA hijacking in Beirut was get the damn thing over with right away as the CIA advised.

And how would we have done that?

Let the Shiites loose. Forget it. We've lost this one.

Wouldn't giving in like that encourage more terrorism?

No. What encourages them is to get all that prime time on television. They wanted the publicity they got. And they wanted us to look like jackasses, which they succeeded in doing. In a war, you lose battles now and then. The best thing to do is cut your losses and get the hell out. They were hoping we'd drag it out.

You think the media was out of control?

The media is always out of control. It's not supposed to be under control. That's what we have to live with in a free society. You can't prevent the media from doing what it wants to do. But you can prevent the media from getting the information in the first place, by having rules for those who have the secrets not to release them to the media.

All right, how would the rules have worked in Beirut? How could you have prevented the madness that ensued?

You know if a plane lands in Turkey right now, the minute they establish there are hijackers on it, you know what happens? Nothing. They cut off all communications. "We want you to release so-and-so." Silence. They just sit there and rot as far as the Turks are concerned. So there's no news whatsoever. It's not

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unethical to give the press false information. We do have a kind of adversary relationship with the press. There's nothing we should try to do to shut them up, but it is absolutely permissible to tell the press whatever is in the interests of the American people to have the press know or think. And they can use it any way they want to. They can be suspicious, as they should be. A good pressman is suspicious of what anyone tells him.

How does your vision of the CIA fit Western democracy?

[*Laughter.*]

Come on, what are Miles Copeland's principles of democracy?

Let me tell you about democracy. First place, I remember Syria. We decided we were going to bring democracy to Syria. So we got a translator in Arabic, and we got signs. We were going to have an election. This is 1946, '47. The signs say, GET OUT AND VOTE FOR THE CANDIDATE OF YOUR CHOICE. We had people coming in the embassy and saying, "Look, these signs are no good – they don't tell us who the candidate of our choice is." In the United States, if we had true democracy, it would be a good thing. But true democracy is impossible now because of the fact that the general population cannot possibly keep themselves well enough informed to decide on issues except on a very parochial basis. The average person, the best he can do is something he's not allowed to do – that's to vote for a man because he's known to be honest and competent. But now a candidate *has* to tell you what his issues are and get elected on that basis. We have to sell the idea to the American public that there are many things about foreign policy the American people simply cannot understand, because foreign policy requires, above all else, judging people according to their own standards. The emphasis should be in choosing people we trust. Where the CIA can work as an institution in a democratic government is, we have to set up criteria where nobody can get into the CIA unless he's honest and patriotic. And I think they've succeeded at that. The guys in the CIA are the most strait-laced people you ever saw.

Who gets your highest marks as CIA director?

I'd have to name two people, and for totally different reasons. I think George Bush was the best. He came in knowing he didn't know a damn thing about the CIA but he did know how to judge people whose opinions he could trust, and he listened to them.

Who is second?

Dick Helms.

Helms lied to a congressional committee.

That's one of his fortunate traits, that he's willing to lie to a congressional committee. William Colby didn't have the guts to do this. Lacking patriotism, he did *not* lie to a committee.

Wait a minute – lacking patriotism?

Absolutely. Why should he tell a group things he knew would leak to the newspapers? He should have lied to them. If he were really a patriotic American, he wouldn't have *thought* of telling them the truth.

And Helms gets high marks for perjury?

With me and with everyone who has ever been a career officer in the government. Absolutely. You can call it perjury if you like, and maybe it was, but he should have been willing to go to jail for it.

It's okay to lie under oath if you're in the CIA?

I said nothing of the sort. If what you know means that telling the truth is going to damage the national interest, it is your obligation. . .

Who decides the national interest?

Do you want me to give you a hard time or do you want an answer?

Both.

Okay, I'll give you an answer: The CIA is set up so that it's impossible for a person as an individual to arrogate to himself the right to lie to a congressional committee or to anyone else. But what he can or cannot say is clearly specified from the day he is sworn in. He can lie to people who are not his bosses, who do not have security clearances. Most congressmen do not have security clearances. When Senator Frank Church asked me something, and he said, "Will you take an oath," I said, "Senator, I'll take the oath, and I wouldn't think of telling you the truth." Personally, I like Colby very much. He's a very fine man, but he's just the wrong kind of guy to be head of the CIA. He's a good guy.

You've got to be a bad guy to head the CIA?

You have to be prepared, as a good soldier does. A good soldier could be religious and have read the Bible, but he's got to go out and kill people. The CIA has to have a separate set of morals. In that sense, you have to be amoral.

Is it true you were once asked by your CIA bosses to kill President Nasser of Egypt?

My old boss, Frank Wisner, passed on to me orders that I was to "explore the possibility" of assassinating Gamal Nasser. Poor Wiz didn't like doing even that. But the order came straight from the White House. Anthony Eden, who was Britain's foreign minister at the time, believed the world would be a happier place without Nasser in it, and the belief grew to enormous proportions after the Suez fiasco. The head of British intelligence, who had a somewhat wry sense of humor, used to say that if either his boys or ours didn't assassinate Nasser "professionally," Eden was likely to do it himself "amateurishly," and the results would be "messy." Eden's attitude was "At least we should look into it." He said as much to his opposite number in Washington, John Foster Dulles, and Dulles discussed it with President Eisenhower, who said, in effect, "Anything to keep Tony quiet." The order was passed down, from the president to the secretary of state to the director of the CIA – Foster's brother, Allen – to Frank Wisner to Kermit Roosevelt to me. I was to visit Nasser, have coffee with him, say, "That's an interesting vase you have over there in the corner," and when he turned his head to look, make the motion of slipping a cyanide pill into his cup just to see if he would catch me at it.

Did you do it?

Sort of, and I didn't have to use the "look over there" trick. Nasser kept looking the other way out of sheer boredom at what I had to say. Just sitting there with Nasser, rehearsing in my mind just how I would go about sneaking something into his lemonade or coffee, I saw how easy it would have been – theoretically, that is. When I got back from the Nasser experiment, I went into the whole question of assassination, from the philosophy behind it to all the ways of doing it.

Philosophy of assassination?

Very important. All these post-Watergate liberals forget that assassination was once a healthy alternative to war. There is only one justification for assassination: to save lives, lots of lives. One life to save many. But as for a weapon of strategy, that's a different story.

What is the justification?

The rationalization by which the so-called war of dirty tricks is justified is that it takes the place of a *real* war in which millions may be killed. Given such a justification, anything goes. For example, you can sometimes gain points in the war of dirty tricks by killing an expendable person on your own side and blaming it on the other. But that kind of nonsense is talked about

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only in meetings where "contingencies" are being considered. In those meetings, it is permissible to suggest literally anything.

One CIA target was President Patrice Lumumba of the Congo, in the summer of 1960. . . .

Well, now, I'll tell you a brief story to illustrate what a great farce that was. The CIA station chief in the Congo at the time, who I knew very well, was a very sober, conservative fellow who harbored the ambition to get into the State Department. Since he was really a CIA man, his State Department job was only a cover – and at a lower grade than his CIA job called for, to the disgrace of his wife. So his main worry was his wife, who was complaining that she wasn't invited to parties and wasn't seated high enough above the salt at dinners. And he was wondering how he got this lousy job in the Congo. One day he was contemplating the sadness of his lot when a message arrived from Washington. It had a code word which means this is something you take seriously because this comes from the White House. Ordinarily, when you get an order from headquarters you never obey it the first time because you're not sure they mean it. It might be some guy telling you to do something to get himself off the hook, being on record as having ordered it. So you always wait until the second time. But if there's a White House code word, you'd better take it seriously. The message from the White House said he was to assassinate Lumumba – to explore means to terminate with extreme prejudice. He couldn't believe his eyes. The last thing he wanted to do was assassinate anyone, except perhaps his wife! But this thing said he had to go kill Lumumba, and he hadn't the faintest idea how to go about it. Well, then another cable came in, saying somebody was coming out from the scientific section. And up showed this weird little Dr. Strangelove type. So not only does this guy have an order from the White House, he's also got on hand this creep who was going to show him how to do it! Well, the station chief just blew his top, said, "The hell with this," and told Dr. Strangelove to get the hell out.

What else did you get up to in the CIA?

Well, I got my foot in the door in the psychopharmacological department by virtue of my interest in assassination. There are two categories: those which are made to look like natural deaths and those which serve their purpose only if they are known to be assassinations. For the first kind, there is a variety of methods, most of them involving poison. Somehow you introduce into the body of your victim two separate substances, at different times, each of which is harmless by itself but which becomes poisonous when mixed with the other. You wouldn't believe what those weirdos come up with! The congressional subcommittee which went into this sort of thing got only the barest glimpse.

What did they miss?

You can kill a man by putting a certain substance on a letter you send to him which gets into his system simply through his holding the letter in his fingers. You can make him allergic to almost anything – alcohol, aspirin tablets, even coffee or tea – that if he takes even a small quantity of it he will drop over dead. You can program a pair of dogs – even his own dogs – to savage him to death upon a given signal. You can do any number of imaginable and unimaginable things. But you don't have to kill him; you can just make a fool out of him.

For example?

You can slip an LSD pill into his lemonade as he is about to make a speech or have an electric fan blow "distress gas" onto him, or you can doctor his notes so that simply by holding them in his hands he will absorb enough hallucinatory materials to make him think he is God. One of [Indonesian president] Sukarno's best, most electrifying speeches, I understand, was made after one of his assistants, a CIA agent, doctored his shaving lotion. The agent simply forgot that Sukarno's wildest ramblings were made when he was cold sober and that a hallucinogen could only make for an improvement!

What do you think of today's CIA?

The organization itself is great, and Mr. Casey is tops, but the government won't let it move, and the press is intent on preventing any secret operations it might try to run. As you know, unlike *The New York Times*, Victor Marchetti and Philip Agee, my complaint has been that the CIA isn't overthrowing enough anti-American governments or assassinating enough anti-American leaders, but I guess I'm getting old. What's keeping the agency inactive is Congress and disinformed public opinion. With modern communications being what they are, we're supposed to be the best informed people in history, but we're not. We're the *most* informed, which is hardly the same thing.

You seem to take an active interest in American politics. Do your sons share your interest?

It's my impression my oldest son, Miles, has actually contributed to Republican congressional campaigns, but I'm not all that sure. That's one area of my son's activities he doesn't confide in other members of the family about. *[Laughs]* My son Miles – he wants everything everybody says about him these days to be cleared in advance.

Does Miles have anyone in mind for the presidency in 1988?

I know Miles has his eye on Congressman Jack Kemp [Republican – New York]. I think that's his candidate, but I don't know. [Miles Copeland III denies that he supports Jack Kemp or any other Republican or Democratic candidate for Congress or for the presidency.] He's always planning several years ahead. Miles is pretty secretive about his affairs. He should have been in the CIA instead of me. Yeah, I'm "blah blah blah," and he's "hush hush." I'm not sure he's thought through all the implications of the power he's got.

What do you mean?

The next time you go to a Police concert – say, one like that in Shea Stadium, with 70,000 young minds open to whatever the Police decide to put into them – you can answer that question for yourself. ■

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